

VICE-PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS IN '64.

THERE are two incidents in regard to the nomination of Vice-President in 1864 which for obvious reasons did not get into the newspapers of that day, but which bit of history may be of interest.

It will be remembered that Mr. Chase was using his position as Secretary of the Treasury to aid in his candidature for the Presidency as early as the winter and spring of 1864. That was supposed to have created some coolness between him and Mr. Lincoln.

Early in the spring of that year, a prominent Treasury official, who held his office directly from Mr. Chase, without the intervention of either the President or the Senate, but yet who controlled the disposition of more property and the avenues of making more fortunes than any other subordinate Treasury official, and who afterward held as large a controlling influence with Mr. Seward, but in quite a different direction, came to the head-quarters of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, ostensibly upon official business.

After that was finished, the actual object of his visit was disclosed by a question, in substance as follows :

"There has been some criticism, General, based on the assertion that Mr. Chase is using the powers of his office to aid his Presidential aspirations. What do you think of Mr. Chase's action, assuming the reports true ?"

"I see no objection to his using his office to advance his Presidential aspirations, by every honorable means, providing Lincoln will let him do it. It is none of my business, but I have for some time thought that Mr. Lincoln was more patient than I should have been, and if he does not object, nobody else has either the power or right to do so."

"Then, General, you approve of Mr. Chase's course in this regard ?"

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"Yes, certainly ; he has a right to use in a proper manner every means he has to further a laudable ambition."

"As Chase is a Western man," said my visitor, "the Vice-Presidency had better come from the East. Who, General, do you think will make a good candidate with Mr. Chase ?"

"There are plenty of good men," I answered, "but as Chase is very pronounced as an anti-slavery man and free-soiler, I think that Gen. John A. Dix, of New York, ought to be selected to go on his ticket, and thus bring to his banner, both in convention and at the polls, the war Democrats, of whom Mr. Dix claims to be a fair representative."

"You are a war Democrat, General ; would you take that position with Mr. Chase yourself ?"

"Are you specifically authorized by Mr. Chase to put to me that question, and report my answer to him for his consideration ?"

"You may rest assured," was the reply, "that I am fully empowered by Mr. Chase to put the question, and he hopes the answer will be favorable."

"Say then to Mr. Chase that I have no desire to be Vice-President. I am but forty-five years old ; I am in command of a fine army ; the closing campaign of the war is about beginning, and I hope to be able to do some further service for the country, and I should not, at my time of life, wish to be Vice-President if I had no other position. Assure him that my determination in this regard has no connection with himself personally. I will not be a candidate for any elective office whatever until this war is over."

"I will report your determination to Mr. Chase, and I can assure you that from what I know of his feelings he will hear it with regret."

Within three weeks afterward a gentlemen who stood very high in Mr. Lincoln's confidence came to me at Fort Monroe. This was after I had learned that Grant had allotted to me a not unimportant part in the coming campaign around Richmond, of the results of which I had the highest hope, and for which I had been laboring, and the story of which has not yet been told, but may be hereafter.

The gentleman informed me that he came from Mr. Lincoln ; this was said with directness, because the messenger and myself had been for a very considerable time in quite warm, friendly

relations, and I owed much to him, which I can never repay save with gratitude.

He said : " The President, as you know, intends to be a candidate for re-election, and as his friends indicate that Mr. Hamlin is no longer to be a candidate for Vice-President, and as he is from New England, the President thinks that his place should be filled by some one from that section ; and aside from reasons of personal friendship which would make it pleasant to have you with him, he believes that being the first prominent Democrat who volunteered for the war, your candidature would add strength to the ticket, especially with the war Democrats, and he hopes that you will allow your friends to co-operate with his to place you in that position."

I answered : " Please say to Mr. Lincoln that while I appreciate with the fullest sensibility this act of friendship and the compliment he pays me, yet I must decline. Tell him," I said laughingly, " with the prospects of the campaign, I would not quit the field to be Vice-President, even with himself as President, unless he will give me bond with sureties, in the full sum of his four years' salary, that he will die or resign within three months after his inauguration. Ask him what he thinks I have done to deserve the punishment, at forty-six years of age, of being made to sit as presiding officer over the Senate, to listen for four years to debates more or less stupid, in which I can take no part or say a word, nor even be allowed a vote upon any subject which concerns the welfare of the country, except when my enemies might think my vote would injure me in the estimation of the people, and therefore, by some parliamentary trick, make a tie on such question, so I should be compelled to vote ; and then at the end of four years (as nowadays no Vice-President is ever elected President), and because of the dignity of the position I had held, not to be permitted to go on with my profession, and therefore with nothing left for me to do save to ornament my lot in the cemetery tastefully, and get into it gracefully and respectably, as a Vice-President should do. No, no, my friend ; tell the President I will do everything I can to aid in his election if nominated, and that I hope he will be, as until this war is finished there should be no change of administration."

" I am sorry you won't go with us," replied my friend, " but I think you are sound in your judgment."

I asked : "Is Chase making any headway in his candidature ?"

"Yes, some ; but he is using the whole power of the Treasury to help himself."

"Well, that's the right thing for him to do."

"Do you really think so ?"

"Yes ; why ought not he to do it, if Lincoln lets him ?"

"How can Lincoln help letting him ?"

"By tipping him out. If I were Lincoln I should say to Mr. Chase, 'My Secretary of the Treasury, you know that I am a candidate for re-election, as I suppose it is proper for me to be. Now every one of my equals has a right to be a candidate against me, and every citizen of the United States is my equal who is not my subordinate. Now, if you desire to be a candidate, I will give you the fullest opportunity to be one, by making you my equal and not my subordinate, and I will do that in any way that will be the most pleasant to you, but things cannot stay as they now are.' You see, I think it is Mr. Lincoln's and not Mr. Chase's fault that he is using the Treasury against Mr. Lincoln."

"Right again !" said my friend, "I will tell Mr. Lincoln every word you have said."

What happened after is a matter of history.

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